

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY  
AND FIRE PROTECTION

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DEPARTMENT OF OFFICE  
OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

P.O. Box 419047  
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July 18, 2003

Dear Chief:

The purpose of this letter is to clarify the State of California's Fire and Rescue mutual aid practices and procedures. In recent discussions between the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), and representatives from both the California Fire Chiefs Association and the Fire Districts Association of California, it became clear that some misunderstandings exist regarding the application of mutual aid.

"Mutual Aid" is utilized when an incident is likely to exceed, or had exceeded, the ability of a responsible entity to control the event. The basic assumptions are that the local government entity has taken ALL actions within its capabilities necessary to mitigate a potential or on-going disaster, and has reasonably exhausted local resources before requesting outside assistance through the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System.

These discussions underscored the fact that each department has a basic responsibility to protect its jurisdiction from potential fire disasters by providing training, planning and equipment, and, as necessary, to formulate agreements for acquiring those services and resources that are reasonably necessary to protect that jurisdiction. Further, it was clear that a real need exists for Chief Officer training in all areas of mutual aid. OES provides information and training to fire agencies at the local and operational area level, and is working with the State Fire Marshal to correct this deficiency through a review and revision of both Level I and Level II state fire training program certified courses.

With these issues in mind, we have jointly developed the attached guidelines for your direction. We encourage each of you to become familiar with the provisions of the documents available for either your duly elected Area Fire and Rescue Area Coordinator, or the OES Fire and Rescue Branch in Sacramento.

It is important to understand that these discussions on Mutual Aid do not preclude the responsibility for entities to develop cost apportionment agreements when emergency incidents involve more than a single jurisdiction. The unified command on a multi-jurisdictional emergency incident is responsible for the apportionment of incident related costs.

We are committed to a cooperative effort to mitigate the effects of disasters in California by supporting the spirit of Master Mutual Aid Agreement and maintaining one of the most efficient mutual aid systems in the Nation. We also want to thank the members of the California Fire Service, as represented by the task force from the California Fire Chiefs Association/Fire Districts Association and the Firescope Board of Directors, for their cooperation in responding to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrea E. Tuttle".

Andrea E. Tuttle, Director  
Department of Forestry  
and Fire Protection

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dallas Jones".

Dallas Jones, Director  
Governor's Office of  
Emergency Services

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Provisions of the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System's Mutual Aid Plan, that provide for assistance without reimbursement, may apply to state resources prior to a declaration of "local emergency" (as defined in the California Emergency Service Act), when a local government entity determines that a fire is likely to exceed its ability to control. Applicability will be based on the following guidelines:

1. From the time of initial attack to the point of determination that an incident is likely to exceed the ability of a local government entity to control, state resources can be made available to local fire agencies through a variety of agreements (e.g., automatic aid, wildland protection, mutual threat zone, etc.)
2. In the absence of an emergency that is beyond the ability of a local government entity to control, mutual aid shall not be used to shift the costs of fire suppression to another political entity.
3. Mutual aid fire suppression resources committed to an incident, under the provisions of the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System's Mutual Aid Plan, should only be used during the period of the emergency. The period of emergency constitutes the time during which mutual aid resources are necessary to prevent imminent or perceived imminent threat to life and property. As the emergency conditions de-escalates, the mutual aid resources should be released, based on a preplanned demobilization process.
4. Entities should make maximum use of locally available facilities, equipment and services.
5. Requests for firefighting resources, for response to an emergency that is beyond the ability of a local government entity to control, are to be based on the "closest resources" concept and initiated through proper mutual aid channels.
6. Federal fire suppression resources which may be the "closest resources" are not part of the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System. Assistance provided by these resources will be on an assistance-by-hire arrangement, unless obtained through other pre-existing agreements.
7. Local government agencies receiving mutual aid are responsible for providing logistical support to the mutual aid personnel and equipment.